

July 3, 2008

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Dear Friends:

As Independence Day approaches, I wanted to take the time to update you on some very important recent legislation that Congress has passed to help our veterans.

On Monday, the President signed the Emergency Supplemental bill into law. In addition to providing our troops the necessary funding to complete their missions overseas, the bill contained what is referred to as the G.I. Bill for the 21st Century. I was proud to support the G.I. bill because it makes a commitment to our veterans that lives up to the sacrifices they have made for our freedoms.

The original Montgomery G.I. Bill paved the way for World War II veterans to become the "Greatest Generation." The new G.I. bill will give returning Iraq and Afghanistan war veterans the same opportunity. Specifically, the G.I. bill increases scholarships at public universities from 70% to 100% of tuition for veterans who have served at least three years since Sept. 11, 2001. It also provides stipends for books and room and board.

For more information on the G.I. bill, please visit: <http://www.gibill.va.gov/S22/S22%20Fact%20Sheet.pdf>

On Tuesday, I convened the first meeting of my Veterans' Advisory Council in Baton Rouge. The advisory council is a group of over 20 veterans from across the 6th District, including retired and active duty officers, enlisted men, reservists, and students. This council will be advising me on the main issues affecting our veterans today. I appreciate their service to our country and their willingness to help me as I serve on the Veterans' Affairs Committee.



*Congressman Cazayoux discusses veterans' issues at the first meeting of his Veterans' Advisory Council.*

At the first meeting, members of the council made presentations on some of the biggest issues facing veterans today. First on the list was veterans' health care, including needed improvements to Tricare, care at VA hospitals, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, and substance abuse treatment. The group also discussed retirement issues, educational benefits, and hardships placed on reservists called up for active duty.

While the main purpose of the meeting was for the council to educate me, I was pleased to update them on some important legislation that has come before Congress. The House of Representatives has passed:

- The **Justin Bailey Veterans Substance Use Disorders Prevention and Treatment Act of 2008**. This bill authorized the expansion and improvement of health care services available for substance use disorders at the Department of Veterans Affairs. It requires the VA to provide the full spectrum of care for substance use disorders at every VA medical center (H.R. 5554).
- The **Veterans Emergency Care Fairness Act of 2008**, which requires the VA to reimburse veterans receiving emergency treatment in non-Department of Veterans Affairs facilities (H.R. 3819).
- The **Veterans' Compensation Cost-of-Living Adjustment Act of 2008**, which provides a cost of living increase for veterans' disability benefits and to dependency and indemnity compensation for veterans' families. The cost-of-living increase is based on the cost-of-living adjustment made annually for Social Security payments (H.R. 5826).
- The **Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Facility Authorization and Lease Act of 2008**, which authorizes major medical facility projects and major medical facility leases for the Department of Veterans Affairs for fiscal year 2009 (H.R. 5856).
- The **Heroes Earnings Assistance and Relief Tax (HEART) Act**, that allows for members of the Armed Services to count combat pay towards the Earned Income Tax Credit. It also provides a tax credit to small businesses which pay reservists called up for active duty (H.R. 6081).

I want to continue the progress we have made on veterans' issues from my position on the Veterans' Affairs Committee. We can do more and we must do more to improve the quality of life for our returning service men and women. If there is anything I can do for you, or if you think there is a veterans' issue that is not being addressed, please do not hesitate to contact me. My office can also help with specific veteran case work issues.

As you enjoy your 4th of July holiday, please take the time to remember the sacrifices our veterans have made to make the United States of America the great country it is today. Indeed, the reason we celebrate the 4th is because a small group of Patriots decided that America is something worth fighting for.

I hope you have a Happy 4th of July!

Sincerely,

Congressman Don Cazayoux

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